

Congressman Robert Wexler
Hearing – US Aid to Europe and Eurasia
Subcommittee on Europe and Emerging Threats
September 14, 2005

Chairman Gallegly, I want to thank you for holding today's hearing on American assistance to Europe and Eurasia. I also want to thank Mr. Adams and Mr. Luten for testifying before the committee today and I look forward to hearing their remarks.

Mr. Chairman, US assistance to Europe and Eurasia has been a critical component of American foreign policy since collapse of the Soviet Union. It has been and continues to be, an essential part of American efforts to promote democracy and civil society throughout Europe and Eurasia especially in Eastern Europe, the Balkans and in former Soviet states.

Successive Administrations have used military and economic assistance including that authorized under the SEED ACT and the Freedom Support Act to advocate social, political and economic reforms. US aid has been used to assist governments seeking to dismantle weapons of mass destruction programs, develop counter-terrorism plans and essential infrastructure and has been used as a tool to reconcile long-standing conflicts from Cyprus to Kosovo to Northern Ireland. In fact several nations, including Baltic States, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia have benefited from these aid programs and have become some of America's strongest democratic allies fully integrated in transatlantic institutions as well as the European Union.

In this vein, it is crucial that Congress and the Bush Administration maintain or increase aid, especially former Soviet States such as Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, whose leaders and citizens are struggling to transform their nations and bring them closer to the West. Although there were recent democratic elections in each of these countries -- Kiev, Tblisi and Bishkek face enormous challenges that without American attention and support, could lead to backsliding and political and economic regression.

To this end, I supported language in the State Department Authorization Act expressing concern that proposed cuts in aid could be detrimental to "US interest in stability, democracy and market reform in the Independent States.

In particular, I am concerned about cuts in the Freedom Support Act Account including a 44% decrease in aid to Russia. While I agree that Russia has taken significant steps to reform its economy -- it is clear that Moscow has moved dangerously away from its commitment to political and judicial reform and our aid. Cutting aid would send the wrong signal to Mr. Putin that America's commitment to a transparent and democratic Russia is weakening, and it would leave Russian NGO's and democratic activists without the resources necessary to survive in an increasingly dangerous political climate.

Mr. Chairman, the Bush Administration should hail bipartisan voices such as Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Lugar who at a hearing earlier this year

questioned the cutting Freedom Support Act aid. Like Chairman Lugar, I believe it is contrary to the interest of the United States and our efforts to expand global democracy, tolerance and peace to reduce aid to fledgling democracies. The democratic change America and our allies are seeking globally is already occurring in Ukraine, Georgia and the Balkans. It would be a serious miscalculation on our part if the US did not pay greater attention to their development and increase our assistance as these new governments face daunting tasks ahead.